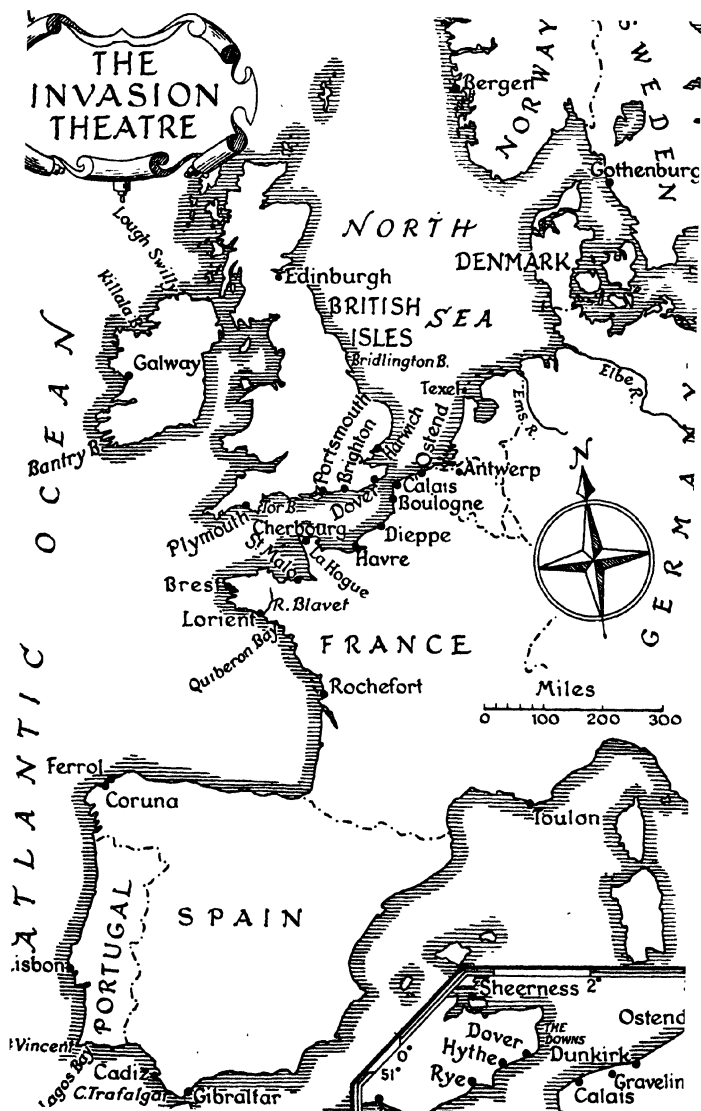
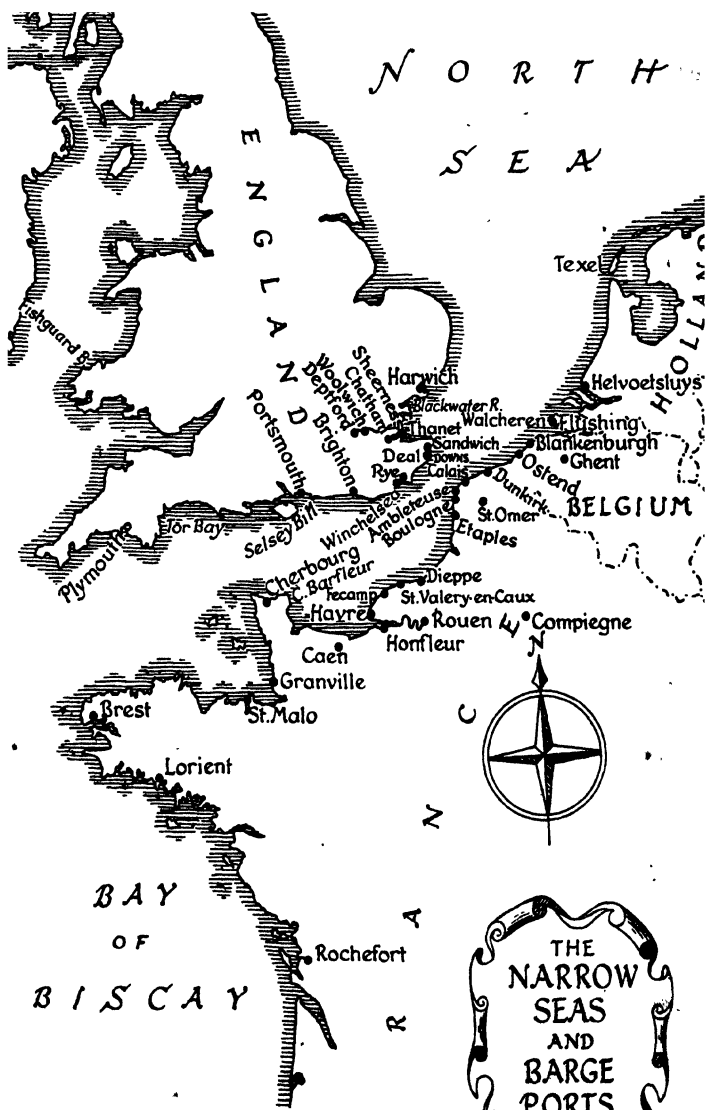


THE INVASION THEATRE





THE INVASION OF BRITAIN

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THE INVASION THEATRE

THE NARROW SEAS AND BARGE PORTS

Drawn by Edward Stanford Ltd.

I

INVASION

THE INVASION and conquest of England only began to present a problem of naval strategy when she had become a real sea-power. It is therefore not intended in the present short sketch to refer to Caesar's invasions in 54 and 55 B.C., Plautius' in A.D. 43, the Saxons' in 449, Angles' in 547, the successive waves of Danes in the eighth, ninth, and eleventh centuries, and the Norman Conquest. No question of naval or combined strategy entered into any of these operations, which consisted of no more than carrying an unopposed army in small vessels across the North Sea or the Straits of Dover. In these invasions the field of battle of the army was simply transferred from the land to the sea. The horde of soldiery, which on land moved on foot, on horseback, or in chariots, was given another mode of conveyance—ships. Army met army and fought with hand weapons or the short-ranged bow. The essence of the matter was that the fighting ship and transport vessel were one and the same. The 'fleet' was an embarked army which fought another army, mainly by boarding. But when the fighting ship became an artillery platform a new factor entered into the problem of moving armies across the sea. The naval battle, instead of being an infantry contest at close quarters, became primarily one of artillery.

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Boarding became an incident in the battle, not the primary aim. The ship which carried troops could not be so powerfully armed with artillery as the ship built specifically as an artillery platform, and she was at the mercy of any gun-armed vessel which was nimble enough to prevent her from getting alongside and employing the infantry method of boarding.

Hence the primary problem of invasion which has presented itself since the fighting ship became a long-range artillery weapon (and this applies to that modern type of fighting ship which navigates in the air) has always been that of how to guard or preserve the transports from attack. Broadly speaking, three courses of action are open to the would-be invader. He may convoy his transports with his fighting ships in one great body; he may leave his transports at home, and precede their movement by attempting to destroy the enemy fleet or to divert its attention from the desired line of passage: or he may use, and depend entirely upon, the weapon of surprise, preparing his movement in secrecy, and making the attempt without warning, and so deprive his enemy both of the time and the opportunity to obstruct his movements.

The first of these methods is only practicable when the invader possesses superiority in fighting power. If he feels himself sufficiently strong, he can boldly proceed to sea, carrying his transports with him, and face the possibility of attack in full confidence that his fighting forces can beat it off. So, on many an occasion—

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some very recent—we have seen armies moved across a sea in the face of potential enemy opposition, under the protection of its fighting ships. Inasmuch, however, as superiority at sea was a cardinal principle of British policy, this method was very rarely available to an intending invader of Great Britain, though occasions have arisen, as in 1692 and 1779, when a superior enemy fleet ranged the Channel. But even when Britain has been faced by strong coalitions whose numerical strength equalled, or almost equalled, her own, as it did in 1744–8, 1779–83, and from 1796 onwards, the concentration and co-operation of all those fleets has always proved a difficult matter, each navy being required to fulfil certain functions within its own waters. Unless, too, a very great superiority should exist, a fleet sailing with a body of transports fights an enemy at a great disadvantage, being obliged so to manœuvre as to protect that mass of vulnerable shipping.

Because of this difficulty, experienced by Britain's enemies, to obtain a great superiority in fighting ships, they have been obliged to use the indirect method of obtaining protection for their transports. The aim has generally been to endeavour to force the British fleet to dissipate its strength by making threats upon a number of the scattered interests of the country; or to draw the fleet away and so bring about a concentration of superior force on the line of passage. It was the constant business of those who conducted the British naval strategy so to direct the dispositions and

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movements of their fleets that superiority in that vital area was never prejudiced.

Finally, there was the method of surprise—the ‘bolt from the blue’. This has always been the most tempting proposition. It required the secret collection of an army, the secret assembly of transport vessels, the concealment of naval preparations. Any one of these was bound to give rise to suspicion in a time of political tension. Perhaps the classic example of this was the attempt of 1744 to which reference will be made later on, but in recent times we have seen this method used by Germany against an unsuspecting neutral, Norway. It was undoubtedly the possibility of the use of such means as this that must have been in Castlereagh’s mind when he insisted, in his *Memorandum on a Maritime Peace*, that the Low Countries must be rendered independent. To leave Antwerp in the hands of France would, he said, be little short of imposing upon Great Britain the charge of a perpetual war establishment, for a constant vigilance, and a state of constant readiness, would be needed in order to guard against such a surprise as it would be possible to organize by an unscrupulous power who possessed the resources of the waterways of Flanders, the inland transport of the rivers and canals, and at the same time a great army, constantly under arms. The recipe for victory recommended by General Erlich to-day lends point to Castlereagh’s views of a century ago. ‘Political agreements, peaceable policy until the last moment, and then, when the odium of aggression has been cast on

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the enemy, who has in reality never considered the question at all, a sudden attack.'

The steps which Britain has taken in the past to guard herself against the danger of invasion have always been both defensive and offensive in character. The defensive is in two parts, which may be described broadly as 'the fleet' and 'the flotilla'. The fundamental principle was that the main body or bodies of the enemy navy should be kept under such close observation that if they put to sea, there was the highest probability of their being brought to action. But as the enemy fleets might be, and in the case of France usually were, based on ports remote from those in which the invading armies and their transports were assembled, a secondary force was needed to attack those embarked armies if they put to sea. Thus every war has witnessed the creation and the extension of a very numerous flotilla of small craft, sometimes supported by heavier vessels, whose specific function it was to deal with the invaders' transport craft by every possible means, ranging from bombardment of the shipping in port, blocking the ports by various forms of obstruction, and attack upon the transports when they came into open water. On all the great occasions of defence against a threatened invasion the importance of sinking the transports has been emphasized. Thus Lord Keith, who commanded in the Downs during the Napoleonic attempt, made this clear to his officers, whom he told to direct their chief attention to the destruction of the ships, vessels, and boats, having men,

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horses, or artillery on board, because 'the prevention of debarkation is the object of primary importance to which every other consideration must give way'.

But while these two purely defensive measures were naturally adopted, there was also at almost all times an application of the principle that 'offence is the best defence'. Offence took various forms. There was the direct method of forestalling the enemy's attack by attempts to destroy his preparations in harbour. From the time in 1587 when Drake singed the King of Spain's beard in Cadiz until the summer of 1940, when the Royal Air Force performed a similar tonsorial act in the Channel ports, this method has never been absent from the British strategical armoury. There was also the indirect method of depriving the enemy of the materials he needed for fitting out and moving his ships. At one time, Lord Burleigh, stopping the supplies of naval stores from the East Lands, remarks 'that without them, the King of Spain cannot fit out a fleet capable of carrying the meanest army'. At another time, the blockade of the principal French harbour of Brest is so effective that naval stores cannot reach the dockyard whereby, for the want of materials, the fleet could not be fitted out. In this later age one of the contributory measures to British defence is the cutting-off of the modern equivalent of masts, sails, and spars in the form of closing the overseas supply of oils, and reducing, by air attack upon the factories, the output of synthetically produced fuels.

II

INVASION IN THE ELIZABETHAN WAR

WHEN, IN 1586, Philip II found his re-conquest of the revolting Dutch checked by Leicester's army of 5,000 foot and 1,000 horse, and his finances injured by the depredations of the English seamen, he decided he must crush England. Invasion was the one course possible. Two methods of procedure were suggested to him. His general, Parma, proposed to make the attempt with the army already in the Netherlands, embarking them in small craft from the harbours there. His admiral, Santa Cruz, recommended that the operation should be conducted entirely from Spain with a great army carried in the fleet. Santa Cruz, who had witnessed a somewhat poor performance by British seamen in an action with the French fleet off the Azores in 1582, was confident that the great Spanish fleet could push its way to England against the resistance of the English ships. The army could be landed in the West Country, which would neither necessitate the dangerous voyage up the Channel, nor involve all the complications of effecting a junction with Parma in the Straits of Dover. But here two factors, finance and shipping tonnage, played their part. The cost of raising 60,000 soldiers and 30,000 seamen and the difficulty of providing the necessary 77,000 tons of shipping,

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appeared to Philip prohibitive,¹ and hence a change was made. The main invasionary army would consist of 30,000 troops from the Netherlands, to be carried in small craft and protected in its crossing by the great ships of the Spanish Navy, who would bring with them a reinforcement of some 20,000 troops from Spain.

The collection of a great body of shipping always takes time—thus our present enemy was unable to make an attempt at invasion immediately after the catastrophe of Dunkirk as his transport was not ready. Ships, men, and artillery were being collected throughout 1586, and though Elizabeth hoped to stave off war, it became evident to her, after the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots in February 1587, that she must now expect the blow. She decided not to depend upon a passive awaiting the attack. ‘Aut fer, aut feri; ne feriare, feri’—‘Suffer or strike; in order not to be struck, strike.’ Saying this, she allowed Drake—though not without misgivings—to attack the Spanish preparation on its own coast; and the injury which was thereby done to Spanish mobilization in 1587 averted the danger of invasion that year. Drake and the other seamen wished to repeat the attack in the following year, and this would have been done but that foul winds prevented the attempt; and those same winds favoured the Spanish fleet and brought it up from Spain into the Channel. The legend that England was saved by the wind dies very hard, refuted conclusively though it has

¹ Williamson, *Age of Drake*, p. 293.

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been by Sir John Laughton, Sir Julian Corbett, and Professor Holland Rose. In so far as the winds showed any favour in 1588 they showed it to the Spanish fleet. Philip II's invasion was defeated because the English fighting ships were superior instruments to those of Spain. On some later occasions the wind was friendly to England.

The defeat of 1588 did not, however, remove the danger of invasion. The war with Spain continued for another fifteen years, and during that time the attempt was more than once repeated. Unfortunately the Queen, instead of maintaining a vigorous offensive against Spain, pursued a policy of petty marauding, while Spain, taking the lessons of the fighting of the Armada to heart, largely rebuilt her fleet on English lines.

A new situation arose, when Spain, opposing Henry IV's claim to the French throne, invaded Normandy and Brittany; and England found herself under a threat of Spanish invasion from the French ports. In 1594, Brest was in danger of falling into Spanish hands, 'which I dare presume to say', wrote Sir John Norreys, 'will prove as prejudicial for England as if they had possessed Ireland'. In the interests of the defence of England an army of 4,000 men, reinforced by 2,000 French, was sent to Brittany, which saved the port of Brest from falling into the hands of the Spaniards. But Spanish galleys, operating from Blavet, raided the English coast, and the fears caused by those raids, and by the prospects of invasion of England and Ireland,

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had their effects in restraining the English offensive against Spain in the outer seas, and in her colonies.

A prolonged period of defensive strategy and minor offensives against the Spanish trade was at last broken in 1596 by an expedition sent to Cadiz, with the object, primarily, of destroying the Spanish fleet. In reply, Spain launched a second armada, in the winter months of that year, and, on this occasion, it was indeed the winds that provided the defence of the country. To prevent a renewal of that attempt a fleet of a hundred sail and 6,000 troops was prepared in 1597 to destroy the enemy in Ferrol, 'which being well executed there is no cause for us to doubt of any peril for a long time from him'. But it proved impossible to raise that number of troops and the attempt was laid aside, and England was once more exposed to attack in the October of that year from two directions—a fleet carrying an army of 9,000 troops assembled at Ferrol and a galley flotilla with another 1,000 in Brittany. The whole force sailed in October, intending to land at Falmouth. Once more the weather was kind to England. Much of her fleet was abroad at the time, and what was at home was not fitted out; but a storm scattered the Spanish fleet within sight of the Lizard. The country had certainly passed through a great danger.

The possibility that the country might be open to invasion when the fleet was abroad on some distant enterprise, or even unready at home, had struck a distinguished soldier a year earlier. Sir Henry Knyvett

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had then proposed that a system of universal military service should be adopted by which all men of between eighteen and fifty, irrespective of classes, should be enrolled and trained; and at the same time as thereby providing an army for defence at home, an expeditionary force, composed of the more mature men, of 24,000 foot and 6,000 horse, should be constituted. A somewhat similar proposal was again made thirty years later by Viscount Wimbeldon,¹ at a time of a great decline in the Navy after the disastrous economies of the pedantic James I. 'God forbid', he wrote, 'that if the Navy should be absent or impeached by any mischance (the actions at sea being much more uncertain than those of the land) that we should therefore give the Kingdom lost.' England had been conquered four times when she had no navy, but conquest could be made a very difficult matter if proper arrangements existed for the use of well-trained men, good officers, and a sound system of military defence. The principal measures he recommended were an organized system of coast-watching, with strong points at all the vulnerable landings ('How can any imagine that a number of men can land safely out of a boat when two or three hundred musketeers play upon them?'), and with concentrations of mounted infantry in selected positions in rear, able to move swiftly to any threatened point. We see something not unlike Lord Wimbeldon's scheme in operation to-day, coast-watchers and defended

¹ 'How the coasts of your Majesty's Kingdom may be defended against an Enemy, if in case your Royal Navy should be otherwise employed or impeached . . .' London, 1628).

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beaches, and mechanized divisions in places of his mounted infantry. Militia, volunteers, fencibles, Territorials, and Home Guards have been the successive eleventh-hour means of providing a 'full-back' for the forwards and three-quarters of the Navy whenever a serious threat of invasion has arisen.

To return to the Elizabethan invasions. In 1599 Spain resumed her attempts, for there was no other way of crushing the intolerable opposition of England. She approached France (who, for the personal advantage of that very King to whose support England had come so recently, had abandoned England and made peace at Vervins the year before) with a request for the use of the ports in the north and west of the seaboard as bases for attack upon England. The request was refused, and, in default of these advantageous positions, Coruña was made the centre of a new set of preparations. An invasion planned from that port was only countermanded in consequence of a Dutch attack on the Canary Islands which threatened the security of the Spanish treasure fleet. Attack—though conducted by her ally and not by her own forces—proved the best defence on this occasion. But there is no doubt that the Queen, by her abandoning of the initiative and her neglect of the Navy, had exposed the country to a grave danger from which it had had a narrow escape. A very remarkable feat of mobilization was performed which would have averted a landing if it had been attempted in the eastern part of the Channel; but the West Country was open, and the

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8,000 Spaniards could have been landed in Ireland, there to assist Tyrone.

Once more, in 1601, Spain planned an invasion and was allowed to make her preparations without interruption, and to sail without interception. Forty ships, carrying 5,000 troops, sailed from Spain for Ireland. Bad weather drove many of them home, but 3,000 men were landed at Kinsale, where they were met by an active and skilful soldier who kept them at bay until in November a naval squadron arrived which, having destroyed the Spanish ships, enabled military movements to be made by sea, and so improved the situation that the Spanish force was compelled to surrender.

Thus, though the great attempt of 1588 had been so signally defeated, England was exposed on a number of occasions to the danger of invasion, and successful descents were made in Ireland during the following fifteen years. The reason was that no resolute and consistent strategical policy aiming at securing and establishing the command of the sea was adopted. The consequences were that Spain was able to rebuild her navy after its disaster, and upon lines copied from the English; to regain the initiative; and to protect her convoys of treasure: while England, confining her efforts to sending military help to the threatened territories of her associates in the Low Countries and France, and to comparatively small marauding expeditions against the Spanish colonies and shipping, found herself constantly thrown upon the defensive, warding off blows instead of delivering them, and being saved,

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on more than one occasion, by the winds rather than by her own fighting forces. The skill, the courage, and the enterprise of her seamen and soldiers were hamstrung when the Queen persisted in abstaining from the application of her own excellent motto, 'Strike or be struck'.

III

INVASION IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

FOR NEARLY a century after Elizabeth's death England was not seriously threatened with invasion. There was one occasion, in 1625, when she was engaged in a dispute with Spain concerning the Palatinate, on which reports of great activity in the Spanish naval bases and at Dunkirk—then a Spanish port—gave reason to think that the security of the country was threatened by the King of Spain who—so the instructions ran—‘had armed himself with a great fleet to divert us (i.e. the support it was proposed to send to the Continent) by attempts upon us in Ireland, or in England, or by raiding our ports and making new harbours upon Flanders side’. Thus, the Elizabethan doctrine, ‘Strike or be struck’, had not been wholly forgotten in spite of King James I's neglect of the Navy and Army. The Commander—the Lord Wimbledon who was an advocate of a military form of defence of the kingdom—was told among other things that ‘the chief intention of this voyage’ was the weakening and disabling of the enemy in his sea forces and trade, the taking and destroying of his ships of all kinds, the destruction of his provisions and magazines, and depriving him of his seamen, mariners, and gunners. The fruits of James's neglect were unpreparedness in the Navy and Army. An expedition designed for the summer could

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not sail till October; it lacked experienced officers; it was composed of an undisciplined rabble. Hence, though complete surprise was achieved, the attempt was a complete failure. The vices of extemporization and insufficient preparation, both material and moral, which have so often either ruined or marred British conjunct operations since the seventeenth century, were present in full flower, and with their invariable result, in this defensive, or preventive, expedition.

Greatly as the principles of the Commonwealth were an offence in the eyes of many continental princes, and gladly as these rulers would have seen and assisted in the victory of the Crown, no serious attempt was made by them to give help to the King's cause either by invasion or the supply of arms; for the Parliamentary navy stood in the way. In 1643 some French transport vessels with arms did indeed succeed in evading the squadrons in the North Sea and reaching Bridlington; but the Parliament ships were quickly upon them in the harbour, and the transports were sunk. The Queen's appeals for help went as far abroad as the Baltic. In 1646 she begged the Duke of Courland to send a squadron from his respectable little navy of thirty ships to protect a body of French transports on their voyage to England: but he could only sadly reply that willing as he would have been to send ships, munitions, and provisions, he was unable to do so. The strength of the Parliament navy was too great.

The invasion by the Prince of Orange in 1688 is one that has the appearance of being a successful attempt

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in violation of the principle that no invasion in force is possible over an uncommanded sea. Surprise was absent, for King James was well aware of the Prince's preparations and had sent out squadrons to prevent any such an attempt; but it was uncertain where the expedition would attempt its landing, for it could either go northward to the east coast or westward into the Channel. In order to guard against both of these possibilities the fleet was stationed in the Gunfleet; but the position proved defective, for the wind that brought the Dutchmen out kept the British fleet in harbour. Lord Dartmouth was in a difficult position, for he had under him commanders who plainly did not want to fight; and to add to that he was baffled by the 'Protestant' wind. Because of the political threads and the vagaries of the weather the invasion of 1688 does not call into dispute the principle that invasion over an uncommanded sea is, as Napoleon said, one of the most dangerous and difficult operations that could be undertaken. The Prince of Orange was fortunate in being favoured in his great gamble by the concatenation of a number of events, political, personal, and meteorological.¹

The general dislocation of the kingdom, and of the affairs of the Navy, in the winter of 1688, enabled Louis XIV to land an army unopposed in Ireland: and an indecisive action between a British and French squadron in Bantry Bay left the communications of

¹ For a detailed study of the invasion of 1688, cf. E. B. Powley, *The English Navy in the Revolution of 1688*. (1928.)

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the army with France uninterrupted. But as communications between England and Ireland across the northern part of the Irish Sea also remained open it was possible to send a British army into Ireland which defeated the invaders and their local friends at the Boyne in 1690, notwithstanding reinforcements having reached the French; and the intruders were ejected. But an undue dissipation of the British fleet, in consequence of a cry for the protection of trade in the Mediterranean, brought about a situation of naval inferiority in the Channel, and while William was beating James at the Boyne the Anglo-Dutch fleet was being beaten by Tourville off Beachy Head. Invasion then appeared imminent. It was in this situation that the well-worn and much-misused expression, 'a fleet in being', had its origin. The English admiral, Torrington, whose fleet, though it had lost some ships, was still in good order, retired towards the Thames, intending to keep touch with and threaten the enemy, and in that manner to contain him and prevent him from undertaking any considerable operation. 'Most men were in fear that the French would invade, but I was always of another opinion, for I always said that whilst we had a fleet in being they would not dare to make the attempt.' In other words, since the French had not established such a superiority that they could with safety convoy an army of the size necessary for the decision across the Channel in face of a weaker fleet they could do nothing decisive. The hampering effects of being responsible for guarding a great body

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of merchantmen are important. The Dutch admiral, Tromp, had expressed something of the same idea when he said, 'I would wish to be so fortunate as to have only one of the two duties, to seek out the enemy, or to give convoy; for to do both is attended by great difficulties.' The Allied superiority at sea was recovered in the autumn of the same year, and the danger of invasion then disappeared. The threat of invasion was revived in 1692, when a belief that the Jacobites were ready to rise, and that the captains of the Navy would throw in their lot with the ex-King James, induced the King of France to make preparations for an attempt. An army of 24,000 was made ready, the infantry at La Hogue and the cavalry at Havre. It was intended that the Brest fleet should rush the transports to Torbay before the English and Dutch fleets were ready, and return to Brest, where the squadrons from Rochefort and Toulon would then be, and the joint fleet would defend the army's communications. It was thought that all this could be done before the Allied fleets, which had been laid up during the winter each in its own ports, could join, and success depended upon the two elements of this expected unreadiness and surprise. But the secret leaked out. Movements of the fleets began at once, with the result that when the French fleet, still deceived by false reports of unreadiness and disaffection, was ordered to sea with categorical directions to fight the supposedly inferior Allied fleet, it was met by a superior fleet and decisively defeated; from the shoreline of La Hogue King James and his army witnessed

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the destruction of the ships and realized the consequent destruction of their hopes of invasion.

In Queen Anne's War threats of invasion were slight. The armies of King Louis were very fully employed, and his navy, after the Battle of Malaga in 1704, was committed to the strategy of the *guerre de course*. One occasion, however, did arise of an attempted incursion. The Jacobite dissension gave France an opportunity to create a diversion in favour of the Pretender in Scotland. Louis XIV was in correspondence with the Jacobite leaders from 1705 onwards, and the plans of an invasion in support of a rising in Scotland were discussed. In the end of 1707 the conditions appeared favourable and preparations were at once put in hand. A force of 6,000 troops, escorted by a squadron of seven stout frigates and carried in twenty-three fast sailing privateers, was to assemble at Dunkirk and seize an opportunity to sail for Edinburgh, where it would be joined by local supporters of the Jacobite cause. In spite of attempts to preserve secrecy the news that some extensive preparations were afoot became known in London within a month. What were unknown were the size of the force and its destination. Cadiz, Flushing, Portsmouth, and the West Indies were among the possible objectives discussed, but for whatever place it was destined there was one position at which it must be intercepted—its port of departure, Dunkirk. The measures taken in London were the formation of a respectable squadron in the Downs, a watch upon Brest, and the preparation of transports to bring back

to England the troops then in Holland. So soon as this squadron was ready it was sent off to Dunkirk, with orders that if it should appear practicable an attack was to be made on the enemy in the port, but, if this were not possible, as constant a watch was to be kept upon the squadron as the weather would permit. Previous experience had shown the difficulties of maintaining a persistent and effective watch, in consequence of the weather, and the question was therefore considered whether the port could be blocked. This, however, was rejected, as the well-armed Dunkirk galleys and the fortifications of the harbour would stop the blockships before they could get into the narrow channels, and even if some should be sunk in those channels they would soon be swept out to sea by the strong tides: and, while they were in position, they would not form a complete obstruction, for shipping could pass over them at high tide.

The able and energetic French seaman, Forbin, to whom this attempt was committed, was confident that it would be possible to get his force to sea; but that was only a part of the operation. It had also to reach the Firth and complete the landing of its 6,000 men. He had no illusions that this would be easy or undisturbed, for he knew the British would soon be upon him. '*Une entreprise chimérique,*' was his opinion of the expedition; and so it proved to be. Admiral Byng was quickly on his heels and reached the Firth of Forth only a day after Forbin and before he had even begun his landing; for the expected Scottish Jacobite army

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with which he was to unite failed to make its appearance. Then Forbin found himself in imminent danger of being trapped by a greatly superior force, and it was only through the kindly favour of the wind that he escaped and regained Dunkirk with a loss of no more than one man-of-war and half a dozen transports.

IV

INVASION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

PASSING OVER some comparatively slight threats of invasion by Charles XII of Sweden, who sought to conquer Norway in order to obtain a port from whence to throw a force into Scotland in support of the Pretender, and some displays of force in the northern ports of Spain indicating an intention to send troops to invade either England or Ireland during the two short tussles with Spain in 1718-19 and 1726-7, a noteworthy attempt to carry out a surprise invasion was made in 1744. At that time France and England were not at war with each other though each was acting as an auxiliary to the opposing combatants in an European war. In the late autumn of 1743 King Louis XV, tired of giving his unrewarded and unsuccessful help to Bavaria, determined to reap some benefit for France by the conquest and annexation of the Austrian Netherlands. Well aware that this would bring about an open war with England, he decided to forestall any action by England by invading her without any declaration of war. Estimating that all the troops in England put together numbered no more than 19,000, and that these were so scattered about the country that at the most 5,000 could be assembled at any one place, it was concluded that an invading army of 10,000 men would be enough. Thrown

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suddenly into the Blackwater, they would have little difficulty in overcoming the small forces which were in the south of England, and in seizing London, which done, peace would be dictated at once. Therefore a force of about that strength was quietly assembled at some distance inland from Dunkirk, ostensibly to go into winter quarters there. For transport, a minimum of tonnage was taken up. It was hired at a number of different ports, chartered and provisioned for a variety of voyages, including America, and filtered in driblets into Dunkirk. As the fitting out of a fleet at Brest was bound to arouse suspicion in England and cause her to prepare her own fleet, the first intention was to dispatch the transports from Dunkirk with no more protection than those frigates normally in service at that port which could drive off any British small craft. But the risk was apparently considered too great, and it was arranged that a division of four heavy ships should be sent from Brest to guard the transports across the Channel, while the main body of the Brest fleet would make a sudden descent upon the British fleet, which, it was hoped, would be found lying unprepared at Spithead—a hope that would have little expectation of being fulfilled once the ships at Brest were being fitted out: for the British intelligence system was well informed of what happened in the French naval bases. So, for all the attempts at secrecy the fact that something was in the wind leaked out and the fleet was mobilized at Portsmouth, scouts were sent over to have a look into Brest, and some heavy ships

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in the bases in the Thames were manned and made ready to look after the Narrow Seas. The news of this did not reach the French until after the Brest fleet had sailed, and when the French admiral heard of it he at once decided that the proposed escort of four ships was too small and that he must take the whole of his fleet to Dunkirk to cover the transports. Without making sure of what was happening at Portsmouth he went up-Channel, arrived off that port, and at once began the embarkation of the army. Two-thirds of the troops were on board when the British fleet appeared from the westward, and was only prevented from attacking at once by a timely calm and a west-going tide. Disaster was staring the fleet and the embarked troops in the face when darkness fell. In the night the fleet cut its cables when the ebb-tide set in and, showing no lights, drifted silently down-Channel unseen. Then up sprang a fierce easterly gale which carried the fleet back in safety to Brest, hotly pursued, but not caught, by the British. The gale wrecked many of the transports. The invasion came to an end.

Invasion entered into the French war plans in the earlier part of the Seven Years War. As the British superiority at sea prevented the French from reinforcing their army in Canada, the natural course of action for them was to crush England by invasion. In July 1756 some 50,000 French troops were brought together in camps at La Hogue, St. Malo, Dunkirk, Calais, Dieppe, Havre, Granville, and St. Valéry, thus threatening the whole south coast of England. It was intended that

the fleets at Brest and Rochefort should combine to convoy the army, and at the same time feints were to be made against Scotland and Ireland. The army for England would sail in two parts, an advance force going first to seize a port, to be followed by the main body. Finally, still further to divert the British efforts, an army of 4,000 men was prepared at Toulon with the British base in Minorca as its objective. Like all true diversions, this had a dual object—if the British sent a fleet to the Mediterranean they would be weakened at home; if England refused to be drawn into the Mediterranean, she would suffer the loss of her invaluable Mediterranean base. Owing partly to undue fears in England of an invasion for which sufficient transport was not ready, and partly to the weakness of her land forces, Ministers delayed in sending a squadron to deal with the Toulon armament: and when it went, it was commanded by a weak man. Minorca was captured. But the invasion of England did not take place, for the French could not obtain a superiority in the Channel.

A more ambitious scheme was proposed in 1759. Troops were assembled in Flanders and a great number of flotilla craft in the Channel ports. The intention was that 20,000 men would suddenly embark at Ostend in flat boats, land in the Blackwater, and march on London. Another 20,000 men would be sent on ship-board from Brittany to land in the Clyde, escorted by the whole Navy of France, including the Mediterranean squadron, which was to concentrate at Brest and, after

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landing the army at the Clyde, proceed north-about round Scotland and appear off Ostend to cover the passage of the army. A subsidiary corsair force from Dunkirk was simultaneously to raid Ireland. The British answer to this scheme was, in general, to form flotilla forces in the Channel with cruisers in support of them; one body would watch Dunkirk and another Havre and the Channel ports, where a number of flat boats was massing. A flotilla of bomb-vessels bombarded Havre where, though some material damage was done to the flat boats, the injury was moral rather than material. The Channel fleet kept its eye on the fleet at Brest, the squadron in the Mediterranean watched the Toulon squadron; and, when that squadron passed Gibraltar, it was pursued and defeated off Lagos. Having disposed of that force, the admiral (Boscawen) sent some of his squadron home to reinforce the Channel fleet. In November, after several months of blockade, Hawke intercepted the Brest fleet and destroyed it in Quiberon Bay. The invasion was thereby rendered impossible. The flat boats could do nothing by themselves against the British flotilla craft and cruisers.

By this time there was a clear understanding of the respective functions of the flotilla and the fleet and the principle which governed the system of defence in the later wars was well established. The British flotilla dominated the invasion flotilla; the British fleets prevented those of the enemy from going to the help of their own flotillas and at the same time guarded the

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outer parts of the kingdom against any attack upon a scale larger than a raid, with which the military forces could effectively deal. A great many ingenious plans whereby to break down this system of defence were prepared by the active French thinkers in the years after the peace of 1763.¹ They embraced every variety of artifice for misleading and dissipating the English main bodies by feints, diversions, false attacks, and attempts upon colonial positions. The aim of nearly all was to scatter the British fleet and so render it inferior in the Channel. The purpose of the manœuvre was thus defined in a paper written by the Comte de Broglie. 'The principal object should always be the landing in England. . . . All other projected expeditions must have the essential object of puzzling the enemy, of occupying his attention, and dividing his forces, so that he shall be unable to prevent the passage of the army and its disembarkation on the English coast.'²

Possibly the most comprehensive and dangerous of these plans was one propounded in 1777, based on the combined action of Spain and France which, it was anticipated, would before long be possible. Recognizing the inefficiency of the Spanish navy and its tactical incompetence, the writer, the Comte de Broglie, proposed that Spain should be assigned a part to play by herself of a diversionary character, while France, unhampered by the proved difficulties of co-operation

¹ These may be found set out and analysed by Lieutenant R. Castex, of the French Navy, in *Les Idées Militaires de la Marine du XVIII^{ième} siècle*, Chapter VII.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

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between fleets of different nationalities, would strike the decisive blow. How to strike that decisive blow as early as possible was the problem de Broglie set himself to solve. First and foremost there must be no squandering of force on small objects. 'No little squadrons, no convoys, no distant expeditions; great fleets, all our forces in one sea, a naval battle at the outset, a lively and short war.' Mere concentration of all ships in one sea would, however, not attain the great end: superiority over the more numerous British fleet. It must be forced to dissipate its forces, and, though 'no distant expeditions' is one of the ingredients of the plan, distant expeditions figure in the plan for the specific purpose of scattering the British Navy: not for purposes of defence or conquests of possessions abroad. Accordingly Spanish fleets and armies were to attack Gibraltar and Jamaica: twenty-seven Spanish ships thus employed would, it was anticipated, occupy the attention of thirty-five British. A simulation of an invasion of Ireland from Ferrol would force England to keep fifteen ships cruising off that port. France would use a few ships to threaten Port Mahon, and some more in the East Indies, whereby England would have to send a larger number to both those areas. A raid on Scotland would be made with a frigate force. Finally, a concentrated body of forty of the most powerful ships of the fleet would challenge the British fleet whose greatest strength after all these detachments had been made would be no more than forty-five ships. The individual superiority of the French ships would outweigh the

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numerical superiority of the British. A decisive action would result and, with the command of the sea, an invasion could be undertaken.

It did not prove possible to put this ingenious plan into operation, and on the only occasion on which a combined Franco-Spanish fleet did appear in the Channel in marked superiority over the British, it was unable to achieve anything, for the British hovered about and never allowed themselves to be brought to action in unfavourable circumstances till the enemy, weakened by sickness and running out of water, had to return to their own ports.

While the French were thus preparing their plans for the operations at sea which would give them the necessary command of the sea British soldiers were considering how to meet the danger if a landing were effected. A memorandum written in 1771 by General Guy Carleton (afterwards Lord Dorchester) illustrates what was feared and what part our military forces were expected to play in that event.¹ 'The only difficulty France has to fear, in carrying a plan of invasion into execution, arises from our superior fleet; could her transports pass the sea unmolested, our land forces, were they much more numerous than at present, could not guard our extensive coast, nor prevent an enemy's getting ashore.' Great, however, as the naval obstruction was, France would probably attempt to invade England at the opening of the next war, as 'the most judicious way of carrying on a war with Great Britain

¹ Fortescue, *Correspondence of King George III*, Vol. II., p. 294.

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is to establish the seat of war in England'; for, owing to her inferiority at sea, she could do England no decisive injury overseas, though she could injure her in India and Canada. Even in those parts the difficulties would be great, and it would take a long time to reach a favourable situation.

Carleton therefore concluded that on the approach of war France would assemble a large army on the coasts of the Channel and in the Biscay ports, the former for an invasion of this country and the latter for distant, probably diversionary, operations. He visualized the possibility that the fleet might be driven into harbour during the winter storms and prevented from getting to sea again before the same wind from the south-east had carried the French troops across the Channel: a repetition of the situation in which William of Orange effected his crossing. He supposed the formation of an army of 40,000 veteran French troops divided into five corps of 8,000 men each which would land at Hythe, Rye, Brighton, Shoreham, and Arundel. The Hythe corps would be directed successively on Maidstone, Chatham, and Sheerness, the Arundel corps would march on Portsmouth, and the other three would make for London, destroy the shipping in the river, the timber stores, and the naval and artillery stores at Deptford and Woolwich. Thus the principal objectives were those whose loss would cripple the Navy.

Provided the crossing could be made, the rest presented little difficulty, for the British weakness on land was such that no effective opposition could be expected.

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The regular troops numbered no more than 10,000 and were scattered about the country, and the 31,000 militia would stand no chance against the French veterans. Therefore it was necessary to empower the calling up of the militia immediately danger threatened and incorporating it with the regular army, and also to raise a secondary militia for local services who should be trained in peace as guerrillas and partisan fighters, particular attention to be paid to marksmanship and 'Indian' tactics, so that the enemy might be constantly harassed in the most skilful manner.

When the war, whose course Carleton was endeavouring to forecast in 1771, broke out in 1778, and France threw in her lot with the revolting American colonists, she could not at once attempt invasion as she lacked superiority at sea in the Channel. Her help was needed in America, whither a squadron from Toulon was sent, and she bent her efforts to assisting the colonists and to the capture of some of the British islands in the West Indies. In the spring of 1779 she attempted an invasion of the Channel Islands with 5,000 men in flat-bottomed boats, but it was repelled by the local garrison. But on her being joined by Spain in that year, the opportunity for an invasion presented itself, as the allies would outnumber the British in home waters. Fifty thousand troops were assembled at Havre and Cherbourg, whose preliminary destination was Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, and the French fleet at Brest, evading the watch of the Channel fleet, effected a junction with the Spanish fleet from Cadiz off

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Finisterre. A combined fleet of sixty-six great ships and a mass of frigates and lesser vessels appeared in the mouth of the Channel, where the British had no more than fifty ships. Thus the superiority de Broglie hoped to achieve by his combinations was greatly exceeded, and the army behind it was greater than Carleton had calculated upon. Everything looked favourable for a descent.

The British reply to this threat was, as ever, of a twofold nature. Squadrons of frigates and flotilla craft, based on the Downs and the Channel Islands, were formed to watch the invasion ports and to prevent the assembly of transport vessels, and the Channel fleet cruised in the mouth of the Channel, not allowing itself to be brought to action in unfavourable conditions, but maintaining a constant threat to the enemy. The hopes of the enemy were that their overwhelming force would destroy the Channel fleet, or hold it, while a detachment fell upon the blockading cruisers and flotilla off the invasion ports and then escorted the army to the Isle of Wight and protected its disembarkation. That, however, proved impossible in face of the Fabian tactics of the British admiral. The smaller, but more nimble, British fleet could, in Kempenfelt's words, hang continually upon the unwieldy armada, constantly threatening it, cutting off convoys of provisions and stragglers, and, 'if they attempted an invasion, to oblige their whole fleet to escort the transports, and even then it would be impossible to protect them entirely from so active and nimble a fleet'. So, though

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the great enemy fleet arrived in superior force off the Lizard, its attempts to crush the British fleet were foiled, and the French admiral could not venture to come into the narrow part of the Channel in pursuit of his weaker enemy or weaken himself by making the detachment for cruising the blockading cruiser forces. His time was limited by his power of endurance, and that was measured by the health of the crews. As fuel to-day prescribes the limits of sea-keeping of a fleet, so in those days fresh water and food prescribed those of the fleets of sailing ships. Scurvy set in after a month or six weeks and a return to harbour was necessary. So the combined fleet had to return to Brest, having proved unable to obtain that superiority which was the essential preliminary to a movement of the transports, which remained locked up in their harbours by the secondary forces of the British flotillas.

V

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IDEAS FOR invasion were already being put forward in the latter part of 1792 when feelings against England were running high in France. The opportunity was represented as favourable in a number of ways. England was weak financially, crippled by the cost of her war with her late colonies. In man-power she could not compare with France—with seven millions of population to France's twenty-five: she was hated in Europe, Tippoo Sahib was her enemy in India; the slaves in her colonies would rise against their masters; Ireland only awaited the chance to expel the English from their island. Certainly the hour had struck for crushing her once and for all.

Though schemes for attacking England by means of light vessels and transports from Cherbourg were propounded during 1793, the outbreak of the revolt in the Vendée occupied too much of the available French forces for any attempts to be made during that year. Indeed, there were fears that the French coasts themselves would be attacked, and in consequence of demands for reinforcements of the coastal garrisons some 6,000 additional troops were sent to Cherbourg, Lorient, Havre, Granville, Dieppe, St. Malo, Brest, and Rochelle in the spring of that year. Still, proposals

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of many kinds for the invasion of England poured in, many of them totally impracticable. A *coup de main* of 100,000 men was to be thrown across the Channel, devastate London, destroy the dockyards, and then withdraw. This was a raid, not an attempt at conquest, for '100,000 men could not stand up to a million' when the whole nation sprang, as it would, to arms. Two important elements seem to have been overlooked in this raid: the difficulty of concealing the preparation of this large number of men and the necessary transports for them (for the basis of the scheme was surprise), and the protection of the shipping if the secret did leak out. For although a considerable part of the British fleet was then in the Mediterranean, there were many ships at home, and the Brest fleet was in no condition to achieve command in the Channel. Part of the transport would be made from Brest, where shipping would be assembled and whence the troops would be carried to Calais, where they would be joined by 30,000 more, who would embark in barges, brought there under colour of a movement up the Rhine. It was a simple and ingenious scheme which gave little credit to the intelligence—in both senses of the word—of their enemy. At the same time General Hoche was pressing for an invasion. 'Ever since the beginning of the war,' he wrote, 'I have never ceased to believe that it is in their own country that we must attack the English.' He asked for fifty veteran and fifty newly raised battalions. Forty thousand men would be enough to overthrow Pitt and cause a demand for

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peace. As to crossing the water, all that was needed was to arm the entire merchant marine and force the passage by sheer numbers. 'Point de manœuvres, point d'art; du fer, du feu, et de patriotisme,' were all the ingredients needed.

In the end of September 1793 the French ministry ordered all preparations to be made at once for an invasion by 100,000 men, 30,000 at the ports of Calais, Havre, and Dieppe; 36,000 at Cherbourg; 24,000 at Granville and St. Malo; and 10,000 at Brest. But as the fleet at Brest was in no condition to move and the troops were shortly after needed in the Vendée, this fell through. Hoche renewed his advocacy of an invasion in 1794, but the battle of the First of June crippled the French fleet and removed any danger of invasion for the time.

The year 1795 was quiet, but in 1796 the troubled condition of Ireland brought it into the picture. The great partisan of invasion, Hoche, advocated the infiltration of small bodies of troops who would form centres around which the disaffected could gather and whose function it would be to harass the British administration and troops, destroy bridges, obstruct roads, and, in general, carry out 'sabotage'. The same thing might, he suggested, be done also in England, small 'cells' working to create a 'Chouannerie', breaking prisons and releasing criminals, attacking public road services, and so forcing the authorities to provide guards, and thereby, in general, create a diversion of military effort. The idea met with favour, but the problem of getting

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the saboteurs into the island stood in the way. 'The difficulty,' wrote Hoche, 'is in the transport. Sydney Smith blockades our ports with four frigates, two brigs, and some *chasse-marées*. . . . Our troops must be carried in frigates, corvettes, or privateers—provided they are good sailers.' Thus the idea was a raid, its object plunder, demoralization, and diversion; the method of its execution, evasion. It was not an invasion, but resembled the 'nuisance raids' we are witnessing to-day conducted by aircraft. The force proposed was of 1,500 regular troops and some 500 or 600 convicts; 10,000 muskets for distribution to revolutionaries were to be landed. The West Country was the selected area.

Preparations for this raiding scheme were completed in July 1796, and the raid was about to sail, when the Directory changed its mind. A study, prolonged over many years, had been made of the use of small craft for invasion—gunboats, sloops, bomb-vessels, and the like, and a Swedish officer, Muskeyn by name, who had seen service with the Russian galleys in the Baltic—vessels which had played a considerable rôle in that sea from the time of Peter the Great onwards, and had carried out heavy raids on the coast of Sweden in spite of the presence of a British fleet of ships of the line in 1720–21—suggested the building of craft, on the general lines of the 'light Liburnian' galleys of the Greeks, for the transport of troops. The suggestion was welcomed. Orders were given for the construction of a number of these craft at Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, and Cherbourg. The first intention was that the

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invasionary force should consist of 5,000 men; that the rumour should be spread that the Channel Islands were the objective. The place of assembly and departure should be Dunkirk, from whence the expedition would sail at a favourable moment, day or night, and, having coasted to the north in Dutch waters, strike across to the northward of Yarmouth, 'thereby to avoid the ships of war that may be stationed in that part', and make for the Tyne. Surprise, and its handmaid, panic, were hoped for, and the destruction of all the shipping in the Tyne would be the aim. Promising as this appeared to its begetter, it found little favour with the soldiers who were appointed to execute it. In October the general reported that 1,500 men had deserted and 'those who remain say openly they would rather be chopped into pieces than set foot on board the flat boats'. An experimental sortie resulted in many losses and this, combined with the evidence of the close watch maintained by British vessels, caused the abandonment of the scheme in November.

Attention was now once more turned to Ireland, then seething with rebellion. A plan was made for three simultaneous expeditions, starting under cover of the fleet at Brest, one to land 30,000 men in Ireland, another, of 60,000 men, to land in England, a third, sailing in two echelons, to go to India to assist Tippoo Sahib: a very considerable dispersion of effort. Great expectations were entertained of the Irish operation. 'It would be superfluous to dilate upon all the advantages that the independence of Ireland would confer

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upon France.' Five thousand troops would sail first and land in Galway, followed quickly by a further 6,000, composed largely of bandits; at the same time another 5,000 would sail from Holland, go north-about and land in Galway. Thus some 16,000 men would be in Connaught, and the criminals and others already planned to land in the West Country would play a diversionary part in the enterprise. The Indian plan was dropped on Hoche's objections to such a scattering of means, and, in its final form, the expedition was to consist of 20,000 men who, with the Brest fleet as escort, would put out from that port, evading the British fleet. Speed was enjoined upon the Commander, in particular for the fleet. Immediately it had seen the army safely ashore it was to lose no time in returning to harbour. Thus it will be noted that there were three elements upon which success depended: evasion of the British fleet in the west, the weakness of the British army, and the strength of the insurgents in Ireland.

The whole force got away from Brest on December 15th. It was a little smaller than had been intended—13,897 men—escorted by seventeen ships of the line and nineteen other vessels. To mislead the watching British frigates it took a southerly course on leaving, and then swept northward for Bantry Bay. It was scattered by bad weather and hence arrived in dribbets. But arrive it did. 'From 20th December till 6th of January French ships had lain at anchor in Bantry Bay for 17 consecutive days, with the exception of the 28th only, without any opposition from the

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English cruisers. No important concentration of troops had been made to oppose the army, while the French could have landed 6,400 men on 24th December, 4,000 more on the 27th, and another 4,000 between 3rd and 6th January. That is to say that practically all the force could and should have been landed.¹

But it was not landed. Bad weather interfered and made it difficult for the ships to hold on in their anchorage. After buffeting with the gales the enterprise was abandoned and the ships returned to Brest, having lost two ships of the line and two frigates as well as several transports. The weather had been a good ally, and the British escape from a great danger was due to the winds, not to the fleet. The reason for the failure to intercept the expedition while on its way, or before it had made its departure from Bantry, was that the position taken up by the main body of the fleet was at Spithead, where it lay so far from the objective that in most weather conditions it could not reach the spot where it was needed in time. In other words, it was not on interior lines. The enemy did not sail unobserved. He was sighted and followed by a frigate, one of three watching Brest, and the news was carried to a rendezvous in which an advanced squadron of ships of the line was to have been cruising. But that squadron was not in its position; it was fifty miles out to sea and could not be found for five days. Then there was uncertainty as to where the enemy

¹ Desbrière, *Project et tentatives du débarquement dans les Iles Britanniques*, Vol. I, p. 213.

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might be gone and the Admiral decided to make for Spithead. There the Commander-in-Chief had received the news of the enemy's sailing on the 21st, but he in turn did not get away till January 6th: and when he reached Bantry the enemy was back in port. It was a severe warning. It showed the need for adopting a more advanced position, and also for a stronger land force in Ireland: there were not more than 8,000 troops in the Cork district, a force which Hoche's veterans could easily have overwhelmed.

The following year—1797—witnessed a small raid on Fishguard. Its objects were to interrupt or hinder commerce, to start a rising in Wales, and to facilitate a landing elsewhere. A body of 1,500 desperadoes, closely resembling the private armies of variously coloured shirts of totalitarian Europe of to-day, was to burn property and do injury of any kind it found possible. The excuse for this particular form of blackguardism has a familiar sound. 'Mais c'est la guerre. Les Anglais ont incendié sans merci en Amérique; ils ont essayé d'affamer 25 milles d'hommes en France.' Slipping out of Brest on board some fast vessels, and showing false colours when sighted by an English packet boat, the expedition landed 1,200 blackguards in Fishguard. They surrendered to a body of militia of less than half their strength.

Though this was a trivial affair there was real danger in 1797. Mutiny broke out in the fleet, banks were breaking, the funds depressed, and the country shaken by Hoche's landing in Ireland. Jervis relieved the

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situation by his victory at St. Vincent, which dispelled the threat of a Franco-Spanish combined invasion; but a fleet of fifty-six sail, twenty-nine of them of the line, lay in Brest with an army behind it, to meet whom if it should succeed in crossing the water, there were not more than 15,000 regular troops and a body of cavalry in Ireland. 'The state of ferment in Ireland,' wrote Carnot to Hoche, 'offers the most favourable opportunity for humbling England.' But the Channel fleet returned to duty and Brest was kept under a close watch. In the North Sea, however, the disorder continued at the Nore, and a Dutch fleet lay in the Texel with an army of 15,000 men intended for an invasion north-about. The way was to be swept clear by a naval battle. The fleet would put to sea and fight Admiral Duncan and, if all went well, the troops would be sent to Scotland, seize Edinburgh, march on Glasgow, and hold all the northern country. This, it was hoped, would oblige the British to withdraw troops from Ireland and so aid an attack on that island. In October the Dutch fleet put to sea. It was decisively beaten off Camperdown (October 2nd), with the result that neither of the intended invasions was attempted.

But the idea was not dropped. A new French army, under the name of 'the Army of England', was organized, to act in co-operation with the Dutch and to make the attempt in gunboats and other small craft on a vastly greater scale than had been tried before. Sixty specially built gunboats, to carry 9,880 men, were ordered; 250 fishing vessels carrying 14,750 men

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and some men-of-war with a further 1,250 were also to be used. The transport craft were to be divided among the coastal and inland ports—Honfleur, Dieppe, Caen, Fécamp, St. Valéry-en-Caux, Rouen, Havre—and the 'Muskeyn' vessels already alluded to were a prominent feature, for, being armed with a 24-pounder in the bows and a field-piece on the poop, they could fight the smaller British flotilla craft and cover the landing of the hundred men they carried. At the end of January 1798 the Minister of Marine wrote: 'I remark with pleasure that by means of large and small gunboats, Muskeyn's craft, the new construction, and the fishing-boats of the district, the Havre flotilla can carry 25,880 troops for landing.' Other ports to be used were Antwerp, Ostend, and Dunkirk, and work was put energetically in hand to deepen and render available the ports in the Straits of Dover—Calais, Boulogne, Ambleteuse, and Étaples, the ports which were to be the principal points of embarkation in Napoleon's later great design of 1803-05. By the end of March tonnage was provided for 70,000 men and 6,000 horses in 1,351 vessels from frigates to fishing-boats.

But the great plan came to nothing. For various reasons Bonaparte's eyes turned to Egypt. There his Eastern dream was shattered by Nelson's victory of the Nile, a victory which set minds at rest in England; for until the news of it was received there was no certainty whether the Toulon armament was not designed for an invasion of this country. Among the

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reasons for Bonaparte's giving up the command of the Army of England was his recognition of the fact that an invasion was not possible without command at sea. He recognized that the barges and other landing craft were no match for the fighting vessels of the British flotillas, armed though they were. In February he expressed his convictions in these words: 'Whatever efforts we may make we shall not attain superiority at sea for many years. To carry out a descent in England without being masters of the sea is the most dangerous and difficult operation that can be undertaken. If it is possible it is only by surprise, either by the squadron at Brest or the Texel slipping away, or by landing from small craft, during the night, in Kent or Sussex, after a passage of 7 to 8 hours.' Long nights were needed; after April it would be too late, and preparations were not sufficiently advanced to enable an attempt to be made before then. It may here be remarked that at a later date the Emperor altered his views on this question of the season. In 1805 he selected the summer for the operation.

All these preparations were closely watched in England. The watch on the French fleet bases was maintained, the British flotilla forces in the Channel and North Sea were increased. At the same time thoughts were directed towards the active form of defence—attacking the enemy in his ports. In the latter part of 1797 a Colonel John Bruce was called upon to 'ascertain from authentic documents what arrangements have been adopted, in former periods, when

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France threatened invasions of Britain or Ireland, to frustrate the designs of the enemy, by attacks on his foreign possessions or European ports, by annoying his coasts, and by destroying his equipments? Bruce accordingly made a survey of all the conjunct expeditions carried out during and since Elizabeth's reign. He pointed out that among the objects of the major operations of this kind one was 'to destroy the armaments which he [the enemy] had assembled in his principal seaports, Brest or Rochelle (for instance) for the invasion of the south of England or Ireland; St. Maloes, Havre, Dunkirk, &c. for the invasion of the north of England, or of Scotland'. At the same time as he wrote his report—possibly as a result of the study he had made in preparing it—Bruce suggested that in the then state of the war, when England was without allies to whose efforts she could contribute by diversionary operations, her true policy was to make herself secure by destroying the enemy's naval forces in their ports. After the defeat of the French expedition to Egypt by Nelson's victory of the Nile, and the revival of the European coalition that followed it, that policy was attempted, first at the Helder in 1799; but for various reasons, mainly of a political character, it was not carried through.

To return to the situation in 1798. It was known in London that the boats of the invasionary flotilla that were fitting out at Flushing were to be sent to Ostend and Dunkirk by canal, thereby to avoid making the passage in open waters where they were exposed

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to attack by the British flotillas. Hence, in the spring, an expedition of 1,200 men was sent to destroy the sluices of the Bruges Canal and, if possible, the craft at Blankenberge and Flushing. The landing was made successfully in spite of some opposition; one great sluice was blown up and several vessels destroyed; but before the small force could re-embark, an on-shore breeze sprang up which rendered embarkation impossible, and the force, surrounded by superior numbers, was compelled to surrender. The damage it had done was respectable but not irreparable. It was, in fact, a minor operation of active defence.

While the intention to make a major attempt at invasion by the French flat-boat flotilla was abandoned in the spring of this year, attention was still directed to Ireland, where rebellion broke out with violence in May. Maintaining the threat of the flotilla in the Channel and Narrow Seas, French expeditions were organized to send help to the rebel forces. In August 1798 a squadron of four sail of the line left Rochefort with 1,150 men under General Humbert and a quantity of arms and landed at Killala Bay. It overcame the resistance of a small force of yeomanry and fencibles, gained the support of a few malcontents, and attacked successfully a body of over 2,000 regular troops at Castle Bay. But its career was soon cut short. A greatly superior body of British troops surrounded it and forced it to surrender on September 6th at Ballinamuck. A second expedition suffered a more severe reverse. Intended to synchronize with Humbert's attempt, a

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force of 3,000 men, convoyed by a ship of the line and eight frigates, it sailed from Brest, but was sighted by British cruisers on September 17th. It succeeded in shaking off its pursuers and, making a track to the southward and a subsequent wide sweep to the west, reached the offing of Lough Swilly. There luck deserted it. A squadron of three heavy ships and five frigates was in the path and two only of the French ships escaped. The defeat was decisive and brought the attempts upon Ireland to an end for the time, causing also the abandonment of a more ambitious scheme which had been approved before the news of the disasters had arrived, for sending another 4,000 men and a great quantity of arms to Ireland escorted by a strong squadron of six ships of the line. Summing up the attempts planned by the Directory, there were, according to Colonel Desbrière, altogether seven. Of these, five were actually tried, two were brought to an end by action with British squadrons, two were feeble and useless, one—that of Humbert—made its landing, but was brought to book, without affecting the situation, by the military forces under Lord Cornwallis. The record was not an encouraging one and a lull in such attempts followed, but proposals continued to pour in upon the Directory during 1799. According to one, a number of small bodies were to be thrown into the Irish ports from the Shannon to Donegal and Londonderry, protected by the combined Spanish and Brest fleets which were to combine and fight the British and, having defeated them, support the numerous landings.

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Simultaneous descents should be made at Harwich, Sheerness, Thanet, Sandwich, Deal, Rye, Winchelsea, and Brighton, from which points the eight columns would march on London, assisted by diversions at Portsmouth and Plymouth. But the plan furnished no answer to the question of how these troops were to overcome or evade the British flotillas. Another proposal, recognizing the impossibility of matching the British at sea, called out for surprise landings at the naval and shipbuilding yards—Chatham, Woolwich, Sheerness, and Deptford—attack on the 2,000 sail of shipping in the port of London, and an expedition from Cherbourg against Portsmouth. But here again the problem of how to evade the flotilla was not solved. The schemes are of no intrinsic importance beyond showing how ardently an invasion was desired as the one means by which the opposition of Great Britain could be overcome.

The tenacious General Humbert resumed his advocacy of an invasion in October 1800. He proposed to fit out three strong divisions at Ferrol, Rochefort, and Lorient and seize Ireland, throw 6,000 troops into Scotland, and embark another 3,000 in fishing-boats in one of the Channel ports for making trouble on the English coast, releasing prisoners from jails, arming malcontents, and, in general, 'sabotaging'. He argued that evasion of the British sea forces presented no great difficulty, and that the weakness of the British military forces and the incapacity of their commanders were such as to render success certain once the troops were

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ashore. He was, however, unable to carry conviction for his views.

More formidable was the preparation that was begun in 1801 when Bonaparte once more took up the study of an invasion by the use of a great flotilla. In March 1801 he issued inquiries as to how long it would take to assemble a hundred gunboats and sloops, how many could leave Boulogne on one tide, what number of men that transport could carry. This led to the constitution of a new invasion flotilla which was to be organized in twelve divisions, three at each of the following groups of ports: Flushing, Ostend, and Newport; Calais, Dunkirk, and Boulogne; Dieppe, Havre, and Cherbourg; St. Malo, Brest, and in the Morbihan. The general idea was that a concentration would eventually be made, probably at Boulogne, of 631 craft and vessels, ranging from five tons to over twenty in size, to carry 30,000 troops. In the eyes of Lord St. Vincent the preparations were very serious and demanded the most effective counter-measures. Nelson was put in command of a mixed force of thirty ships, large and small, and of the land defences between Beachy Head and Orfordness. He favoured an active policy of attack in preference to waiting for the enemy to come out. He bombarded the flotilla at Boulogne and claimed to have sunk ten out of the twenty-four craft in the port, a claim that must be compared with the French report that no more than two vessels were injured. His fire was directed only at the shipping, and the *Moniteur* could admit that 'comme les

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canonnières rasaient les rivages, on a fait peu de mal à la ville de Boulogne: on avait proposé de la bombarder, mais le Lord Nelson dit qu'il ne faisait point la guerre aux femmes et aux enfants.'¹ As a result of his experience Nelson felt confident that no invasion could be made from Boulogne and that the most likely attempt would be from Flushing and the Flanders ports, where the vessels were not within reach of attack from the sea. He was, however, not satisfied that the defeat of the invasion could be assured in the winter months and suggested a conjunct expedition to capture Flushing: he quoted the elder Pitt to the effect that the best defence was to keep the enemy at a distance. But the winter, in which it would be difficult to maintain an active defence at sea, was also a time in which it was risky and difficult for the invasionary flotilla to get to sea and cross the water; and as the year went on the flat boats and other craft were laid up and the enterprise given up.

While these were, on broad lines, the measures taken at sea, the land forces were raised to a number of about a quarter of a million, of whom 95,000 foot and 15,000 cavalry were regular troops, the remainder being yeomanry, militiamen, and volunteers.

The peace of Amiens brought the war to a temporary end. In 1803 Britain was again at war with Napoleon, this time single-handed from the beginning, and the whole of France's efforts could be devoted

¹ *Moniteur*, August 12th, 1801. Quoted in Desbrière, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 336.

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to attempting the conquest of Britain. Only a brief outline of the vast and constantly changing measures by which the Emperor aimed at effecting an invasion can be given here. The preparations, as is well known, were on a scale far exceeding that of any previous attempt.

The flotillas that had been constructed for the campaign of 1801 had rotted or were out of repair, and before anything could be done against England new vessels had to be built and armed. No flotilla movement was therefore possible, and as the greater part of the ships of the line were abroad in the West Indies, and not more than three of the line were ready for the sea in the Atlantic ports, no attempt could be made against Ireland. In short, for several months in 1803 there was neither a transport flotilla nor a fleet to protect it or escort shipping across the open waters of the Bay; while the Dutch, from whom some help had been hoped, showed no enthusiasm for the Napoleonic cause. Thus, though the British fleet had been drastically reduced at the peace, it was still capable of keeping up an adequate watch upon the enemy ports. On land, it was estimated that there were some 217,000 foot and 33,000 horse available, and these numbers were fairly rapidly increased to about 500,000 men—impressive numbers, but few only of them were regulars, and the militia, in Windham's words, were 'as good as any body can be of which neither soldiers nor officers know their business'.

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The French preparations were actively pursued and in October 1803 the Minister of Marine could report the possession of 1,367 vessels of the flotilla—sloops, gunboats, pinnaces, and caiques. Many more voted, and money from private sources was freely subscribed to add to the strength. The ports of Boulogne, Étaples, Ambleteuse, Wimereux, Calais, and Ostend were improved by deepening, by training walls and by wharves, and military camps were established in Holland, at Ghent, St. Omer, Compiègne, St. Malo, and Bayonne.

On the other side of the Channel the British fleet, under Admiral Cornwallis, cruised off Brest, and strong measures were instituted for attacking the transports of the flotilla. Under Lord Keith a force of 6 of the line, 22 frigates, 28 sloops, and 26 lesser vessels was stationed between the Downs and Selsey Bill on the English coast, and stretching as far as Cape Barfleur on the French. The general idea was that divisions of cruisers and small craft should be kept continuously off the French coast to observe and report the enemy's movements and attack any bodies attempting to move between the ports. Behind these, lying in readiness on the English coast, were further light squadrons who would intercept any enemy force that might evade the advanced forces, or reinforce the latter if they were hard pressed. A ship of the line lay at St. Helens to protect the sloops at the end of the line against any heavy ships that might slip out of Brest and fall on them. A compact force

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of medium-sized ships, with as many cutters and gun-boats as possible was to watch Boulogne, Dieppe, and Fécamp, using an anchorage close under Dungeness. The Commander-in-Chief lay in the Downs from whence other cruising craft operated, watching Calais and Dunkirk; and yet another compact body of frigates and smaller craft would lie within the shoals on the Flanders coast; while to watch Helvoetsluys a small force was based on Yarmouth. Seven small vessels were allocated to the watch on the Texel and another six to the mouths of the Elbe and Weser: but it was recognized that it would not be possible to rely upon a blockade of those ports in the winter; that was a very old experience.

The army, both regular and volunteer, was distributed in defined sections of the coast from Scotland to Wales, and in Ireland. The functions of the volunteers, as laid down by the Duke of York in July 1803, were to harass, alarm, and tire the enemy, working in small bodies—to conduct in fact an energetic guerrilla warfare, never allowing themselves to get deeply engaged, retiring when pressed, making the utmost use of their local knowledge, and cutting off the pillaging detachments which were to be expected from French armies, who lived on the country then invaded.

The winter of 1803-4 went by without any attempt being made: for preparations were still incomplete. Such sorties as the flotilla attempted during the six months, November 1803 to May 1804, were costly,

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owing to the rough weather; the losses showed that these vessels were not seaworthy enough for a winter crossing.

Operations against Ireland figured very slightly during the campaign of 1803, but plans for such attempts were considered. In August a scheme was examined for the sending of from 12,000 to 20,000 troops to Ireland, under the escort of some ships of the line from Brest and Rochefort, and combining this with a movement from the Texel, north-about, going either to Scotland or Ireland. But the blockading squadrons lay persistently in the way and, though evasion was not impossible, as previous attempts had shown, the danger was now greater than it had been hitherto, for the blockades were being more rigorously maintained. Whether Napoleon seriously intended to make any such an attempt is, however, still uncertain. It is quite possible that the preparations were merely a feint designed to force a dissipation of force on land and at sea upon his enemy; but it was a threat that British Ministers could not afford to ignore and it obliged them to maintain strong military forces in widely separated parts. At sea it made little difference, as it was indispensable to watch the enemy squadrons in all the ports whatever might be their destination or objects.

By the end of the year 1803 none of the hopes of invasion had come within even a remote likelihood of fulfilment. The flotilla was too unseaworthy to make the crossing in the winter; the business of getting the

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whole of the craft to sea together had presented immense practical difficulties; the fighting power of the craft of which it was composed was insufficient to meet the better-armed sloops and brigs of the British flotillas, to say nothing of their backing of frigates; and the movements of craft from the outer ports to the concentration centres was proving a dangerous business; some got through, but the majority could not move. But perhaps one of the most important elements in the matter was the time that it took to get the whole flotilla out of harbour. Until that was completed the operation could not proceed for it must move along the Channel as a single mass. Not less than six days was needed to perform this part of the movement, and during those days the operation must be uninterrupted either by the enemy or by the weather; and the weather must remain fine for the passage. The impossibility, or at least the improbability, of such freedom from interference by enemy or by weather was so great that so clear-minded a commander as Napoleon can hardly have failed to be aware of it, and the deduction has been made that in reality he never intended the execution of the plan. Nevertheless there was a large body of opinion which considered invasion possible in this form, without even the support of the main fleet for covering the transports. Napoleon, however, was convinced by the end of the year that only the heavy ships could give effective protection to the flotilla of light craft and was thinking out combinations of squadrons from

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Toulon and Rochefort, effecting a junction off Cadiz or Aix and then, fetching a wide compass into the Atlantic, coming up-Channel, sweeping away the British light craft, and opening the way for the transports. At Brest, the Irish expedition would be embarked in order to tie Cornwallis's fleet close to the port; thereby it was hoped that the Channel approaches would be unwatched and lie open for the squadrons from the Mediterranean and Rochefort to move up without being seen or interrupted.¹

This scheme took shape in May 1804 but it could not at once be put into execution. It was in July 1804 that the Emperor wrote the historic words, 'Let us be masters of the Straits for six hours and we shall be masters of the world.'² By then he had entirely abandoned the idea of attempting to evade the English forces by the use of fog and the dark hours of the winter months and contemplated making the invasion in the late summer. The concentration of the flotillas continued therefore throughout the summer at the four principal ports. Frequent combats took place at sea between the craft passing from the outer ports and the British flotillas.³

In September 1804 Napoleon was still thinking of creating difficulties in Ireland. He asked Admiral

¹ Cf. Desbrière, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 638 *et seq.*

² Napoleon to Admiral Latouche, Commanding Mediterranean Squadron, July 2nd, 1804.

³ In July 1804 the flotilla consisted of about 1,800 craft, distributed as follows: Boulogne, 700; Étaples, 290; Wimereux, 340; Ambleteuse, 437. In addition to these, there were another 214 sloops, gunboats, and pinnaces coming from other ports between the Loire and Cherbourg.

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Ganteaume if he could undertake an expedition from Brest, in November, to land 16,000 troops in Ireland—*'le resultat en serait funeste à nos ennemis'*. In the end of September he wrote that the Irish expedition was decided upon, and upon a larger scale. Marmont with 25,000 men—the number varied—would try to land there, and the army at Boulogne would be simultaneously embarked as though it were going to make an attempt on the coast of Kent. The plan of the Irish expedition was as usual to sail from Brest, make a wide sweep into the Atlantic and approach the north of Ireland from the westward, landing at Lough Swilly. It would be escorted by the Brest squadron, which, after landing the army, would leave the transports in the bay and at once make for Cherbourg; there it would ascertain what the situation was at Boulogne, and, if it appeared favourable, the squadron would go up-Channel at once, fall on the British blockading flotilla, and so clear the way for the passage of 120,000 men from the Channel ports; but if weather or other conditions were unfavourable for the move it would pass on through the Straits of Dover to the Texel, join a Dutch squadron, and escort a transport fleet carrying 25,000 men to Ireland, going north-about. 'One of these two operations should certainly succeed; and then, whether I have 30,000 or 40,000 men in Ireland, or am in both England and Ireland, the war is ours.'¹

In order still further to puzzle the British, and

¹ Napoleon to Admiral Decrès, September 29th, 1804.

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oblige them to dissipate their forces, three other operations were to take place simultaneously. From Toulon a squadron of eleven or twelve ships was to sail on 1st November, and, when out into the Atlantic, detach a small portion with 1,200 to 1,500 troops to capture St. Helena and cruise in the offing for the East Indiamen for whom this island was an important homeward point of call; the remainder, with nine or ten ships and 5,000 to 6,000 men, would go to the West Indies, capture Surinam and the other Dutch colonies, and throw reinforcements into San Domingo. After this expedition had left Toulon, another, carrying 3,500 troops, would sail from Rochefort to the Caribbean, capture Dominica and St. Lucia, and then, joining the force operating against Surinam, ravage all the English islands, in particular Jamaica, attack shipping, and return to Rochefort by way of Ferrol in the following March. The connection of these expeditions with the intended invasion was that 'the sortie of these thirty ships will oblige them (the English) to send more than thirty ships. The departure of 10,000 or 12,000 troops, of which they will be aware, will force them to send troops to the most important points.' In other words, as said before, these were diversions in favour of the invasion.

The English secret agents kept the ministry well informed of these preparations. One of them made a good guess as to the broad lines on which Napoleon would probably act. The Emperor was not going, said

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the writer, to risk his flotilla in action against the English cruisers. Boulogne would be his principal port of embarkation, the Brest fleet would take 30,000 to 40,000 troops to Ireland, and an attempt would be made to draw the British western squadron out of the ocean and enable a body of the Brest fleet to come up-Channel and protect the transports. It was so very unlikely that the Brest fleet could thus outwit and out-manceuvre Cornwallis, and occupy the narrow part of the Channel long enough to enable the concentration to be completed at Boulogne and the flotilla to put to sea and cross the Channel, that it seems at least possible (if not indeed probable) that Napoleon was aware that it could not be done, that the Channel project was a blind, and that the plan was intentionally allowed to fall into English hands in order to mislead. In favour of this interpretation is the fact that Napoleon had already become convinced that the flat boats could not make the crossing of the Channel in the winter season. It may therefore be that, so far from being the diversions as they were stated to be, the real function of the Toulon and Rochefort squadrons was to make such serious attacks upon the colonies and the trade that the injuries inflicted by them, together with the constant menace of attack from Ireland, might induce a readiness for peace in England.¹

The news of the activity in the French ports was received calmly in London. Though there was a great measure of confidence there was no relaxation in the

¹ Cf. Desbrière, Vol. IV, Pts. I and III, p. 213.

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preparation. 'This seems a very desperate attempt,' said a letter of instructions to Cornwallis in August 1804, 'and it is likely to terminate in the destruction of their fleet, if they should be able by any unforeseen events to elude your vigilance, and thereby make their way up-Channel. . . . But if the existing Government of France is determined to risk everything in this long-menaced attempt against this country, we are not at liberty to calculate solely on what is rational or probable, but we must likewise keep in view such contingencies as may be barely possible and such as passion and intemperance may give rise to.' Cornwallis was warned that every effort would undoubtedly be made to mislead him in order to get the Brest fleet up-Channel to cover the passage of the army. The attempt was not made. Europe was now becoming restive and showing signs of coming into the war; the relations between Russia and England were good, Austria was in a threatening mood. To balance events Napoleon brought pressure to bear on Spain to enter the war. Pitt fell back upon an old principle. Spain needed money, and the money came in her treasure ships. He sent a squadron to seize them. In reply, Spain declared war on December 1st and then a new set of plans was drawn up in order to take advantage of the addition of the thirty-two ships of the line of the Spanish fleet to Napoleon's navy.

The interest was now transferred from the flotilla to the outer oceans. The whole object of the campaign of 1805, which began with the entry of Spain into the

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war, and ended on October 21st with the battle of Trafalgar, was to obtain superiority at sea, crush the fleet off Brest, and obtain command of the Channel long enough to enable the army to cross. By August the scheme had failed and Napoleon recognized that the game was up. In the end of the month the camp at Boulogne was broken up and his armies marched into Austria and crushed her at Ulm and Austerlitz. Throughout the remaining years of the war there was no longer a danger of invasion.

VI

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

FEARS FOR the security of the country against invasion were aroused in 1847 by the publication of a letter from the Duke of Wellington to Sir John Burgoyne in which the Duke said that the introduction of steam had facilitated invasion. 'As we stand now, and if it be true that the exertions of the fleet alone are not sufficient to provide for our defence, we are not safe for a week after the declaration of war'; for our neighbours across the Channel could seize no less than seven small defenceless harbours or river mouths, land the army, and establish secure communications with France. A disbelief in the power of the fleet gave rise to the idea of defending the country by means of local fortifications which were built at a great cost at Portsmouth, Plymouth, and the Thames. The logical conclusion from the assumption that a system of forts was a sufficient defence was, as Admiral Colomb said later, that if those forts were secure from capture or occupation the communications of the country oversea might disappear without disturbing security. 'We shall probably go fatally wrong,' he said, 'if we suppose there is any real substitute for purely naval defence, or that fixed local defences will free us from the absolute necessity of providing for the ingress to and egress from all our ports, whether fortified or not.'

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Lord Dundonald, the great seaman who, as Lord Cochrane, had shown such a wide range of resource and courage in the Napoleonic war and in the South American wars of liberation, was even more emphatic in his condemnation of the sedentary method of defence against invasion. In words which have a peculiar significance to-day after our experience of the failure of France in the summer of 1940 to render herself secure by her Maginot Line, he opposed the 'Fort' policy of defence; and they are of such permanent application that they shall be quoted at length.

'Immovable stations of defence, as a protection against invasion, are not only costly and of doubtful utility, but a reliance on them is, in my mind, an indication of a declining State. It is little short of imbecility to suppose that because we erect great imposing fortifications an enemy will come to them when he can operate elsewhere without the slightest regard to them; and the more so as the common experience of warfare will tell him, that numerous fortifications are in the highest degree national weakness, by splitting into detail the army which ought to be in the field against him, but who are compelled to remain and take care of their fortifications. Yet half the sum required for fortifications as defences in case of war would suffice to place the Navy in a condition of affording far more effectual protection. There is no security equal to that which may be

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obtained by putting it out of the power of the enemy to execute hostile intentions.’¹

Nevertheless forts were built and the navy was allowed to dwindle. The problem of defence had become confused by being regarded solely in the light of invasion; and even in that aspect the old principle that offence is the best defence had been forgotten. The recognition of the fact that the maintenance of communications is a fundamental element in defence followed few years later, and with that the realization that a navy strong enough to guard the communications is the essential foundation of security against invasion, needing two auxiliary elements to complete the structure—a flotilla capable of mastering the enemy’s flotilla, in which his major effort is bound to be made, and an army of such a strength as will force him to make his effort on the largest scale.

The rebuilding of Cherbourg by Napoleon III, and the outcry of the French colonels at the time of the Orsini affair, gave rise to some anxiety about invasion, and led to the volunteer movement; but there appears no reason to think that the Emperor himself ever contemplated making the attempt.

Fears of an invasion by France during the 'eighties led to a costly scheme for building a chain of forts on the North Downs to defend London; and in 1891 a memorandum issued by the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Stanhope, laid down the doctrine that the primary

¹ Hansard, Vol. CLXVI, p. 591 (1862).

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duty of the Army was home defence: the employment of even an army corps in the field in an European war was stated to be improbable.¹ This policy of defence against invasion primarily by military force held the field until after the South African War.

The Fashoda crisis of 1898 brought England and France to the verge of war, and it would appear that a feeling arose in France that her giving way in that matter was due to a conviction that she had no prospects of success in a war with England. This view was strongly disputed by a French writer in the spring of 1899.² It was, he said, a complete error to suppose that England was invulnerable to invasion. Although the Napoleonic schemes for concentrations of fleets and transports by flotilla had failed, the coming of steam had altered the situation. The Channel could now be crossed, and with certainty. What was needed was a vessel of the barge type, drawing less than a metre of water when loaded to 80 tons, decked over, with a speed of eight to ten knots, and capable of carrying twenty horses below decks and a half company or company of infantry according to whether corps artillery were or were not also embarked. The sides should be sufficiently armoured to keep out rifle fire, a large landing gangway would be provided, and a 47 mm. gun would be enough to deal with attacks from torpedo-boats. Fifteen hundred of such craft would be sufficient

¹ Cf. J. E. Tyler, *The British Army and the Continent*, p. 10. Also Sir F. Maurice, *Haldane*, Vol. I, pp. 170-1.

² *Revue des Deux Mondes*, March 1899, Vol. CLII, pp. 275-302.

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to transport an army from 150,000 to 175,000 men with 500 guns.

While these boats could make the passage of the Channel in a few hours there was still the question, which had baffled Napoleon, of how to protect them against the British heavy ships. The writer thought there was no difficulty in this. If the French battle fleet were concentrated at Brest or Cherbourg, the British would be forced to keep their fleet cruising constantly off the port, as in their day the fleets of Cornwallis and St. Vincent had done. The threat of torpedo attack at night would force the ships to steam at high speed, the fleet would become worn out before long, both materially and physically, and would suffer some losses from torpedo craft, and an opportunity would then be created for a battle on not duly unfavourable terms; and while the British fleet was thus held in the battle, the army would cross the Channel. At the selected moment the barge flotillas would put to sea from their many harbours and steam at full speed for the designated landing-places, so arranging as to arrive at high tide. As the tide ebbed, they would be left high and dry. The disembarkation need not wait for that, for the boats being of such shoal draught the crews and guns could be got ashore on the gang-boards. The landing would be covered by the fire of the quick-firing guns in the bows. 'It is certain that the attack will succeed, nothing can prevent it, for it will be made in a mass, suddenly, at a place unknown to the enemy.' The crossings of great rivers, even in

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the face of an enemy, had succeeded, and why? Because of the superiority of the offensive over the defensive. 'How much easier it is to cross a strait of 40 to 60 kilometres breadth, in boats moving at 8 knots, than to cross the Danube on four bridges, as Napoleon did on the night of Wagram, and that in the face of the whole Austrian army.' The passage would not take more than three or four hours for the whole force, though even if so distant a spot as Brighton were selected for the landing, seven hours would be an ample allowance to make.

The army would be organized in twelve divisions, of 14,500 men each, for the invasion of England, and three divisions for the invasion of Ireland, which would take place simultaneously. The Irish force would be assembled at the Atlantic ports and carried in sea-going vessels. One hundred and fifty ships would be needed for this, and these could easily be obtained as there is always plenty of British tonnage in the French ports which would be seized on the outbreak of war. The actual landing of the Irish army would be less easy than that on the English coast, as the troops would have to be transhipped into smaller craft to get ashore, but plenty of help would be obtained from the Irish. A large quantity of arms would be carried to arm the malcontents and it might be expected that, in the later stages, a strong reinforcement of Irish-Americans would cross the Atlantic in blockade runners.

The English part of the expedition would be prepared in the many ports of the Channel and Dover Straits

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that are served by canals. In the period of waiting every possible means would be employed to exhaust the defenders and to mystify them by means of sorties, feints, false attacks, changes in the disposition of the craft by transferring them from one port to another during the night. In the course of these operations, crews would acquire experience of embarking and of handling the vessels. The only opposition to be overcome would be that of such light craft as would be able to reach the spot at the time of crossing, and as remarked earlier, the guns of the barges would be sufficient for defence. It was not supposed that there would be no losses. The figure of 10,000 was accepted as reasonable, though probably it would not exceed 6,000; hence, as an army of 160,000 was all that was needed to conquer England, provision should be made for 170,000. Whatever might be the attitude of England in the immediate future the construction of such a barge flotilla should be begun at once. Its utility would be permanent; it would cost no more than five battleships which would soon become obsolete, while in peace it would pay its way by being employed for inland transport. Above all, the writer repeated, success was certain. 'Its effective power rests upon the principle of landing men without transhipment, carrying them in a very great number of self-propelled and interchangeable craft; a principle which, true in the time of Caesar, is true to-day, and will be true to-morrow.'

VII

THE WAR OF 1914-18

THE RISE of German sea-power and the possibility that, in a time when it suited her, she might spring a surprise upon this country with a 'Bolt from the Blue', brought the problem of defence against such an attempt into the forefront of defence policy. Erskine Childers's *Riddle of the Sands* had suggested that preparations were being made in the waters inside Borkum for the embarkation of a large army in shoal draft craft which could be launched without warning across the Narrow Seas. A campaign for national service on lines similar to that of Switzerland was instituted by Lord Roberts and the National Service League in 1909, when a Bill was introduced for applying compulsory service to the Territorial Army with the object of raising a force of 400,000 men in order to provide security against invasion when the fleet and the Expeditionary Force were abroad. The proposal was not adopted. The General Staff reported that they considered it impracticable, especially because of the existing critical conditions in Europe. It would take several years to create and get into working order a compulsory system, and in that interval the small professional army would melt away under the increased difficulties for recruiting for service abroad that would arise. The country would temporarily be weaker and would offer

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a temptation to Germany to attack it. 'Our General Staff thought that, were they in the position of the Great General Staff of Germany, they would strike at once.'¹ In an introduction to a small book on *Compulsory Service* Haldane expressed his views on the broad principles of defence against invasion in the following terms:

'A first line army for home defence we do not want. The first line here is composed of the divisions of the fleet in Home Waters and the flotilla of destroyers and submarines which guard our coast-line. These we have to keep at such a strength that they can afford adequate protection against the advent of hostile transports. But it is at least conceivable that some hostile transports will succeed in evading the observing fleet, to the extent of landing a force of moderate dimensions or a series of small detachments. . . . The risk must be provided for. Therefore, although the Admiralty accepts the duty of maintaining the command of the seas which surround our coasts, a second line of security is required against those forces which are small enough to have a chance of slipping through—a *second line that can fulfil the double function of being able either to deal with such forces if they do arrive, or to compel the enemy to send them in such magnitude that they cannot escape the fleet.* The method proposed by the Defence Committee is to raise and train a citizen force which will be greatly superior in numbers to any force that can

¹ Haldane, *Autobiography*, pp. 196-7.

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slip through, and will drive the adversary on to the other horn of the dilemma—that of his transports becoming the target for a superior navy.’¹

At the same time Admiral Sir A. K. Wilson took a similar view. ‘The really serious danger that the country has to guard against in war is not invasion but interruption of our trade and destruction of our merchant shipping. The strength of our fleet is determined by what is necessary to protect our trade, and if it is sufficient for that it will be almost necessarily sufficient to prevent invasion, since the same dispositions of the fleet to a great extent answers both purposes.’ Even if half of the fleet were drawn away by some stratagem, ‘the other half, in conjunction with destroyers and submarines, would be quite sufficient to sink the greater part of the transports, even if supported by the strongest fleet he could collect. The fleets would engage each other while the destroyers and submarines torpedoed the transports. Finally, even if he reached the coast in safety, the enemy would see that it was quite impossible to guard his transports against the attacks by submarines while he was landing his troops; and it was quite certain that a superior force would be brought to attack him before the landing could be completed. Taking all these facts into consideration, he would probably decide, as the Admiralty have done, that an invasion on even the moderate scale of 70,000 men is practically impossible.’

¹ Sir Ian Hamilton, *Compulsory Service*, p. 21.

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Finally, Lord Esher opposed the national service scheme for the reason that if an army were provided at home, on which reliance was placed for security against invasion, the effect would be to weaken British sea-power: we should economize on the Navy and the standard of our sea strength—the Two Power Standard—would go. Britain would become a relatively weak power and, however secure a million men might make the island, she would have no influence outside it.¹

The cost of the scheme was estimated by the War Office at £8,000,000 a year. On this Haldane remarked: 'If this somewhat substantial sum is to be found by the public I should prefer to spend the money on increasing the Navy still further and in adding to the establishment of the Regular Army a new division.'²

Thus, up to the time of the outbreak of war in 1914, it was accepted that the Expeditionary Force, consisting of six divisions of the well-equipped regular army, could be sent to the Continent, and the security of the country would repose in the Navy with the backing of fourteen divisions of the Territorial Army—some 270,000 men. When, however, the moment came it was not judged safe to send the whole six divisions to France. Two were kept behind for home defence.

As we have seen, the assumptions had been made that the Navy would discover and defeat any attempt to land an army of more than 70,000 men, and the

¹ *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, Vol. II, p. 290.

² *Maurice, Life of Lord Haldane*, p. 266.

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Territorial Army would be able to deal with any force up to that strength which evaded the naval watch. The validity of those assumptions was questioned in October 1914, when the advance of the Germany Army had brought it through Belgium to the sea coast and Ostend fell into its hands. It was then necessary to consider the possibility of invasion in the self-propelled light-draught barges, of a carrying capacity of from 500 to 1,200 men, employed on the inland water system of the Rhine and other rivers and canal systems, as well as deep-water transport from the Heligoland Bight. The problem for the enemy, assuming he had the troops to spare, was of somewhat the same nature as that of our earlier enemies: how to protect the comparatively weak barges against the British flotillas and cruisers in the Narrow Seas. Germany's main fleet—the High Sea Fleet—was based in the Bight, and was inferior to the British Grand Fleet stationed in the North of Scotland and, so far as the enemy could know, in a position to cut off the High Sea Fleet if it ventured as far away from its sheltering defences as the coast of England. But there was also a secondary German force composed of the older armoured ships, now no longer fit to lie in the line of battle with the main forces, and a number of old but useful cruisers and torpedo craft, which might be used to protect the transports if the British Grand Fleet were drawn away while the passage was being made. On her side Britain had also a number of ships of the second line, a Reserve Fleet of battleships and cruisers, together with a good

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squadron of modern light cruisers and destroyers in the southern base of Harwich. There were also what were called 'Patrol Flotillas' of torpedo-boats in stations on the East Coast, none of them lying at a distance greater than eighty miles from any point at which a landing might be attempted. The general idea of defence resembled that of earlier times. This force had the same functions as that of Lord Keith in his day—to attack the transports and their defending escort. It appeared unlikely that the High Sea Fleet would be exposed to the double risk of being exposed to attack by the Grand Fleet and to that of the submarines in the coastal waters, to say nothing of the minefields.

For the time no revision of the question was deemed necessary, but in the end of 1915 doubts arose as to whether the original estimate of a maximum landing of 70,000 men was still correct. A number of the Reserve Fleet had by then gone to the East to take part in the Dardanelles expedition, some had been lost; there was a deadlock in France, and it might be that troops could be spared by the enemy to attempt a movement by sea. A remarkable change of view had taken place. It was now estimated that the enemy possessed enough tonnage for, and could embark, 135,000 men secretly—a number raised later to 160,000—and that the first intimation we might have of an attack would be the appearance of his transports off our coast, and that he might have as much as twenty-four to twenty-eight hours before he was seriously interrupted from the sea. We must therefore retain in

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the country troops sufficient to deal with an expedition of this size. Although a stronger battleship force had been established in the mouth of the Thames in the following August it was still considered that the landing might not be interrupted for twenty-four to twenty-eight hours. A more optimistic note was sounded when the matter was reviewed in the end of 1917. Greater weight was paid to the difficulties the enemy would have to face in bring 160 ships out of harbour, the time taken in anchoring, the absence of coastal lights, and the presence of minefields and shoals, the difficulty of landing men from ships anchored as much as two miles from the shore in cross-currents, and the interruption of aircraft, which now had become an effective force. It was therefore estimated that the risk that any force larger than the original 70,000 men could be landed without interference from the Navy was one that could be accepted. Even this called for a large number of troops in the country. Not less than five divisions were considered necessary by some high authorities; while if a more optimistic view should be accepted, to the effect that no more than 30,000 men could be landed without interruption, the number of troops in the country could be reduced to four divisions.

The relation between the intensive submarine campaign and the threat of invasion is to be noted. The difficulty of combating the submarine menace lay in the fact that even after it had been recognized that the most effective defence of the trade was the convoy system, it was not considered possible to put it into

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operation owing to the insufficiency of the flotilla forces; and when so large a number of the flotilla craft were employed upon this essential duty there was some weakening of those forming the coastal defence, which, as we have seen, had always been the first line of defence which the would-be invader from the 'barge' ports had been unable to face. The flotilla, it will be seen, was required for two separate and distinct functions—providing the escorts of the convoys in the Channel, North Sea, and out into the open sea to the westward, and falling, with decisive strength, upon the enemy transports coming from the Bight. The situation, in fact, resembled that of an army which has simultaneously to meet a frontal attack (invasion) and an attack upon its line of communications (the trade routes) and the need was for a cruiser and flotilla force adequate for these two purposes. Fortunately, the British flotillas, reinforced by those of her allies, proved enough to defeat the submarine; and the enemy, failing in his attempt to crush the allied armies in France and to obtain possession of the Channel ports in the fierce offensive of the spring of 1918, could spare no troops for an invasion, even on the small scale of a diversionary raid; and after that failure was himself thrown upon the defensive.

Casting a glance over the experiences of these three and a half centuries, certain facts emerge. The aim of the enemy has been to obtain such a superiority of fighting power in one or another of its forms, as

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battleships, flotilla craft, and their modern successors in the air—that he can give effective protection to his transports. The means by which he has endeavoured to do this have covered the widest possible range, from surprise attacks without declaration of war to forcing a passage by battle. We see attempts to bring about great concentrations of forces of battleships capable of destroying the British battle fleets or of covering the passage of the transport fleets; attempts to produce a dissipation of both the heavy and light British sea-forces by a vast variety of means—landings in Scotland and, more often, in Ireland; expeditions against British interests and possessions in the outer seas from the East Indies to the West, from the Baltic to the South Atlantic; sporadic attacks upon trade by cruiser squadrons and single ships scattered in all parts of the Seven Seas.

The most serious threats have been those in which the enemy has assembled his troops in the ports of the Low Countries and the Channel as far to the west of Havre, for the reason that it is within that region that the largest number of troops can be embarked by the use of a great number of vessels of the barge type. With such craft the risks are spread, the actual operation of landing presents the least difficulties and can be effected most expeditiously, and the vessels, armed with guns in their bows, can give some cover to the troops as they disembark. The number of men that can be taken in deep-water vessels is less, tonnage is less easily assembled, the voyages from the deep-water

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ports are longer, the loss of any single ship more serious, and the troops have to be transhipped into some form of lighter for landing, involving more time. So, in general, the main effort has lain with the forces in the 'barge' ports, and this has been supplemented by diversionary attacks from the deep-water ports, and upon our trade.

Next, though the Navy was always the first line of defence, it was not the only line. The need for an efficient land force was always felt, and the absence of such a force resulted in panic and in inefficient eleventh-hour improvisations of little military value. Unless there were a respectable land force any comparatively small and well-trained regular army might quickly have the country at its mercy, with London in its possession and the Navy crippled by the capture of its dockyards. A small force could be prepared in secret and launched without a declaration of war, and even if there were a warning of its preparation it might, owing to its smallness, evade the watch from the sea and effect a landing. Once ashore its victory over the small and scattered British Army would be certain. To oblige the enemy to make his attempt with large forces was thus an essential factor in the defence against invasion. This the Army did.

The importance of not confining defence to passive measures, but resorting to every means by which to injure his preparations, damage his harbours, cut off his supplies, threaten him with attack in some other part, or destroy his means of transport, both in ships

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and seamen, stands out throughout the record from the Elizabethans to Chatham and Nelson.

Finally, oblivion to, or ignorance of, the fact that the security of the country against invasion is linked up with its ability to defend its trade, and that the Navy must be provided with flotilla and cruiser forces adequate to fulfil both purposes simultaneously, has more than once placed the country in jeopardy. A mistaken idea that the strength of these two types of cruising forces is determined by the strength of those of an opponent, instead of by the scope of the duties which they have to perform, has been responsible for heavy losses of merchant shipping and increased danger from invasion within recent times.

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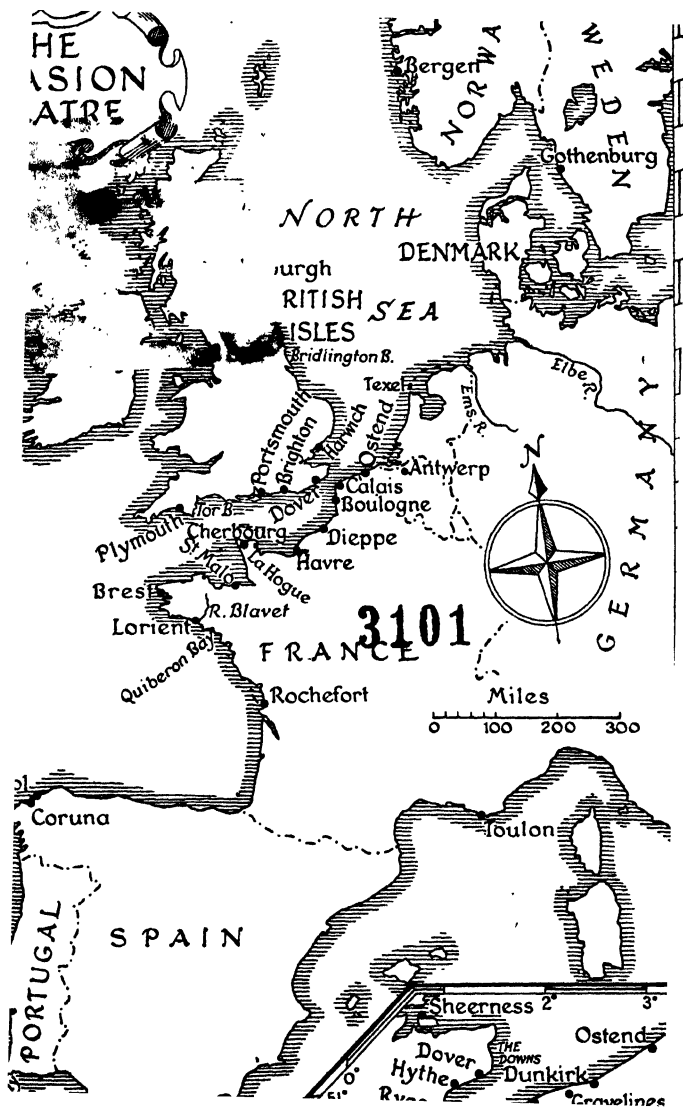
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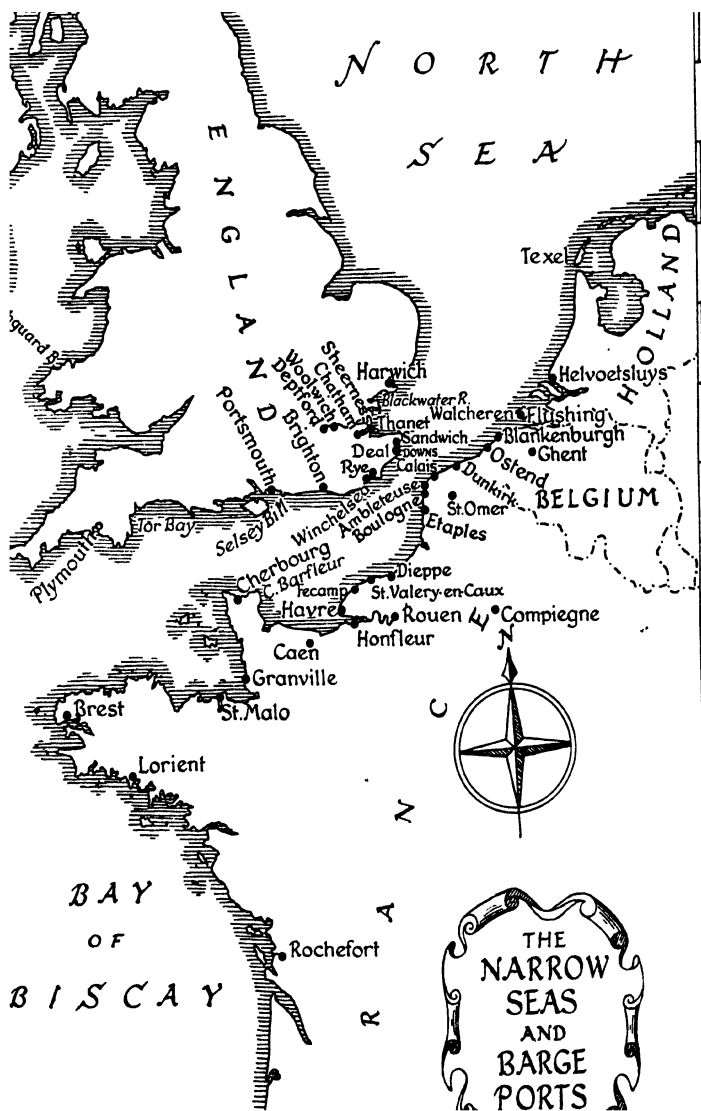
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